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ABSTRACT

In preparation for the possible establishment of a literary magazine at New Jersey's Bergen Community College (BCCC), a study was conducted to gather information on the forms and impact of such magazines at other New Jersey community colleges. Two journals were reviewed: the Journal of New Jersey Poets (JNJP), edited by faculty from the County College of Morris, and The Kelsey Review (TKR), sponsored by Mercer County Community College. The biannual JNJP prints poems, short essays, and artwork from individuals in New Jersey, while the annual TKR publishes material exclusively from people living and working in Mercer County. Questionnaires were distributed to humanities faculty at the colleges to determine the impact of the journals. For the JNJP, 12 of the college's humanities faculty returned questionnaires, with 7 indicating that they read the publication regularly and 8 that they discussed the journal with colleagues. Ten of the faculty praised the benefits of having such a journal associated with the college. For TKR, seven of the college's humanities faculty responded, with four indicating that they read the journal regularly and several citing prestige as a benefit of publishing the journal. Based on responses and opinion expressed by BCCC faculty, it was recommended that on on-line workshop and journal be implemented at the college to help faculty remain connected to their disciplines. The faculty questionnaires are appended. (BCY)

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Literary Magazines at Community Colleges: Their Forms and Impact

Bonnie MacDougall
Bergen Community College
Mid-Career Fellowship Program
May 29, 1997

Issues of Education at Community Colleges: Essays by Fellows
in the Mid-Career Fellowship Program at Princeton University

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Bonnie MacDougall
May 29, 1997
Mid-Career Fellowship Seminar

Literary Magazines at Community Colleges: Their Forms and Impact

The task of this paper is to inquire about the forms and impact of literary magazines at selected community colleges in New Jersey, as a forerunner for the possible establishment of such a magazine at Bergen Community College. Further, this study is directed to the impact such magazines might have on the humanities faculties at community colleges because traditionally humanities faculties have been most involved with, and affected by the publication of literary magazines on their campuses.

1. The Need For Vitality Within One's Discipline

This inquiry began as a response to questions raised during the 1994-95 Middle States Self-Evaluation Study undertaken at Bergen Community College. 1/ In turn, the questions were deepened by THE ACADEMIC CRISIS OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, by Dennis McGrath and Martin B. Spear, read in preparation for this Mid-Career Seminar. 2/

The 1994-95 Bergen Community College Middle States Self-Evaluation Study made a recommendation that "greater efforts must be made to recognize, honor, and reward the significant numbers of faculty involved in varied scholarly and professional

activities" (p.58). By professional activities, the report distinguished discipline-related activities from broader pedagogical activities. "Faculty development activities must not focus only upon the immediate goal of teaching effectiveness and pedagogy but also upon the longer term goals of disciplinary competency, excellence, and renewal" (p.58). The report found that the activities currently supported by institutional funds and energies include "Food for Thought, a series of monthly 'lunch' meetings where faculty from across disciplines meet to discuss pedagogical concerns; monthly workshops targeting special areas of interest; in-service courses; a newsletter; and self-development and improvement workshops" and particularly cited Partners in Learning, where the "focus of many faculty development efforts is classroom research... [aimed] at understanding how students learn with the goal of improving student learning" (p.51). This disparity in interpretations of what constitutes faculty growth or renewal is echoed in the report's finding that "42% [of the faculty] are generally dissatisfied with the college's support of scholarly activities and research" (p.57) and state that "publishing and professional performance activities were undertaken primarily for personal satisfaction and to contribute to the academic field of study, while conference participation and professional seminars were undertaken to remain current in the field and to improve classroom performance" (p.56). The recommendation of the Self-Study that faculty development activities focus on discipline rather than pedagogy exclusively underscores the need of faculties to remain connected to their disciplines.

The need to remain vital in one's discipline is also affirmed in THE ACADEMIC CRISIS OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE. In that study, McGrath and Spear suggest that faculty at community colleges see themselves, and by and large are seen as "an

association of independent journeymen" (p.147). Because faculty are viewed as sole workers, very often levels of stress or dissatisfaction that they might exhibit are perceived as personal rather than community problems. McGrath and Spear argue that "were faculty understood not so much from under the skin, but culturally, their real situation would be better displayed—the overall shape of their professional lives, how they understand their professional role, and the way they are influenced by the organizational culture they both share and shape" (p. 144). Particularly, the problem of "burnout" is perceived, according to McGrath and Spear as the problem of the individual teacher who might be offered workshops in "sensitivity training, stress management, personal development" (p.143). Even if "burnout" is not identified as a problem among a faculty, very often there is a great deal of effort put into making the faculty more "effective" teachers since the centerpiece of a community college faculty is their teaching rather than their scholarship. However, McGrath and Spear show that workshops that focus on improving teaching often operate on "the assumption that pedagogy can be meaningfully separated from the various disciplines, that teachers might be experts in teaching and learning understood generically" (p. 146). Such "learning packages" as well as workshops in using technology in teaching have been "the primary focus of in-service sessions and curriculum development workshops for the past twenty years" (p.146).

This perception of community college professors as individuals not doing enough to improve their teaching styles is the beginning of a slippery slope into unacceptable levels of malaise among faculties. McGrath and Spear argue that faculty might function more productively and happily if they were grouped, perceived, and socialized more along discipline line. They argue that "among community college faculties, unlike university

faculties, social organization does not follow the academic/intellectual organization... [and this deficit has] stripped away any intellectual norms that might bind them together" (pp. 151-52).

It could be argued that faculty in humanties areas are affected by this disassociation from their discipline in particular ways. In studies that McGrath and Spear use, they find that liberal arts faculties exhibit a "pronounced" inferiority complex, and that "teachers in vocational programs don't communicate the same sense of not having made it" (p.140) as those in liberal arts faculties do. One possible reason might be that "while liberal arts faculty typically see students for only one semester, perhaps teaching 'service courses' for vocational students or introductory courses for which there are no corresponding advanced courses, their colleagues in career programs have much more sustained mentor-like relations with students" (p.142). But a far more intriguing reason for this lack of a sense of well-being might be found in McGrath and Spear's observation that liberal arts faculty, many of whom were trained in and to a certain extent *live* by the written **word,** exist in college cultures that are primarily oral, for "teachers are not expected [in community college cultures] to write; few do. More important is that exchanges among community college faculty are not characteristically written. They are spoken, experienced, shared, [and] released from the intellectual norms and social constraints of writing practices, the faculty culture 'concretizes.' Teachers grow deeply suspicious of 'abstract theory,' and turn to experience, to classroom practice, as the only things really worth talking about" (p.152). Rather than that, McGrath and Spear see the need for a new faculty culture in which "schools work to overcome the isolation of teachers by creating a collegial environment which provides opportunities for staff

interaction, and helps teachers view their colleagues as sources of ideas... and shared professional norms" (p.153).

One possible antidote to the malaise of isolation from discipline that both the Bergen Middle States Self-Study and McGrath and Spear find might be the existence of literary magazines connected to community colleges. At least for some liberal arts faculty whose disciplines involved them in the written word, such magazines might foster a vital link to what made some of them enter this profession in the first place.

As some of us at Bergen discuss the viability of beginning some form of on-going literary activity or journal, it is helpful to describe some existing journals at nearby community colleges.

2. Two Models of Literary Magazines Centered at Community Colleges

There are two journals with very different purposes that I would like to descibe. Both seem to have created a vital link to the discipline of writing on their campuses. They are the JOURNAL OF NEW JERSEY POETS, whose editorial board is comprised of faculty from the County College of Morris, and THE KELSEY REVIEW, sponsored by Mercer County Community College.

THE JOURNAL OF NEW JERSEY POETS

The JOURNAL OF NEW JERSEY POETS is a biannual publication, which prints poems, short essays about poets and poetry, and artwork. The JOURNAL invites "previously unpublished manuscripts by poets who live or who have lived or worked in

New Jersey." 3/ In the copies I have looked at, the JOURNAL publishes around 25 poems in each issue, along with an essay and five to ten sketches or photographs.

In a conversation with the Editor of the JOURNAL, Sander Zulauf, I learned that the JOURNAL's first eleven volumes were published by Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison, New Jersey. Mr. Zulauf, known both as a poet and producer of poetry readings in the area, was first approached in 1976, and in 1989 agreed to become the Editor of the JOURNAL, following a commitment of support by his college, the County College of Morris. CCM provided modest release time to Mr. Zulauf and originally based the JOURNAL in the budget of the English Department. Later, the JOURNAL budget was transferred to the Center for Teaching Excellence, where it still remains. The Center for Teaching Excellence is a committee under the guidance of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and has a Director who serves at the pleasure of the Vice President for 1 or 2 years. The Center provides conferences, newsletters, mini-grants for special purposes and other faculty enrichment programs. Currently, it provides $3000 for the publication of 1000 issues of roughly a 70-page issue of the JOURNAL, biannually. Subscriptions to the magazine provide about one half of that sum and are fed into a college fund which cannot be used at the discretion of the Editorial Board of the JOURNAL, but rather, must "re-pay" a part of the $3000 budget. The JOURNAL is printed by The Print Shop at CCM, which delivers its services at approximately 1/5 the cost of a commercial printer.

There are four editors of the JOURNAL who vote, one vote per person on each submission, with the result that no one editor has sway, and that the JOURNAL, therefore, represents more varied tastes than if one editor had final decision on what

poems are published. The Editorial Board decided not to permit submission by members of the CCM faculty in order to avoid the appearance of a vanity press, and to establish a professional level of standard in publishing decisions. Evidently this decision did not diminish its pool of submissions by much, for the JOURNAL receives about 1000 poems per issue to consider. The Board also decided to maintain a local flavor for the JOURNAL. At one point in its funding history, it had been the recipient of New Jersey state grants, and, therefore, had to require that poets who submit work live or work in New Jersey, but when those grants ceased, the editors decided to maintain the identity as a local journal because the editors felt that, without university resources, such as a university press, they could not compete with major university-sponsored journals, even though several JOURNAL readers believe that it is "too good to be regional." 4/

A series of questions about the JOURNAL of NEW JERSEY POETS was distributed to the Humanities Faculty at the County College of Morris, and 12 were sent back. A copy of the questions is attached. The questions were about the impact of the journal on the humanities faculty, no matter how they interacted with the JOURNAL.

Seven of the 12 reported that they read the JOURNAL regularly and 3 more who did not read it regularly said that it was not easy to get copies of it. One respondent suggested that it was "not publicized enough." The answer of the 3 who do not read the JOURNAL regularly implies that they would do so if they could access the JOURNAL more easily. Therefore, 10 out of 12 respondents show a high degree of interest in reading the JOURNAL regularly.

In answer to the question, "Do you and your colleagues ever discuss what you read in the JOURNAL," 8 out of 12 say that they have discussed work in the JOURNAL

with colleagues. So, for a substantial majority of respondents, the JOURNAL contributes to the vitality of their connection with their discipline in an on-going way, both by keeping them connected to some of the fine work of New Jersey poets and essayists, and also by serving as a conversation centerpiece with colleagues.

The question which elicited the most voluble response was the last: "In what ways do you think that the Humanities area benefits from having a literary journal associated, in some way, with your college?" Only 2 respondents said nothing, and the responses of the other 10 were praises, most at some length, of the connection of the JOURNAL and the college. For example, "I think it's wonderful that a community college supports such as significant, professional endeavor. It is to our credit." And, "It's a wonderful vehicle for poets to share their work. I'm proud that CCM is associated with it." Further, "It demonstrates to serious poets that CCM is concerned about the knowledgeable about their work. We are endorsing their art & providing measures & outlets for it," and "we champion, support and celebrate good writing. What else are we here for?" Other respondents noted the "prestige" and "recognition" that the JOURNAL gave to County College of Morris, through the editors of the JOURNAL, who are also professors at the College. One respondent noted that the JOURNAL's association with the College, "keeps us on our toes."

In reflecting on the emphasis so often placed on issues of "burnout," and low morale, most especially, as McGrath and Spear suggest, among Humanities faculty, it seems that the opposite of "burnout" is something that "keeps us on our toes," and something that can elicit the response, "Why else are we here."

THE KELSEY REVIEW

The Kelsey Review is published annually by Mercer County Community College and solicits manuscripts "exclusively from people living and working in Mercer County, New Jersey." 5/ It prints poems, prose, sketches, and photographs, and in the issues I have seen, which run about 80 pages, the organizing principle seems to be an alternation between a prose piece and a poem, with interspersed sketches or photographs.

In a conversation with the Editor of the Kelsey Review, Dr. Robin Schore, I learned that the current Kelsey Review is a revival of an old scholarly journal, first funded (and named after) a Mr. Kelsey who owned the Trenton Times. It briefly reappeared in 1978, but was then let drop until 1988, when it was revitalized by a dean as a publication for the work of Mercer County College faculty and staff. The editorial board discovered, however, that there was not enough production from their pool of about 120 Mercer County College faculty and staff to keep the review going. The board first attempted to create an in-house one year/ in-county the next year plan, but eventually decided to extend submission rights to all Mercer County residents.

The KELSEY REVIEW is funded both by the New Jersey Council on the Arts in the name of a grant from the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission, and by Mercer County College. The Cultural and Heritage Commission grants $1200, which covers the commercial printing costs. Mercer County College provides Dr. Schore with

modest release time and pays for a staff member to layout and proof the copy of the REVIEW.

The decision to make the REVIEW a "home-grown" publication was not required by any funding source, but rather was an editorial decision made to distinguish the REVIEW from others. Because the REVIEW is listed in various small press listings, the editors occasionally get submission requests from writers as far away as Alaska, Texas, and Virginia, and although the editors enjoy such recognition, they believe that they need to preserve their Mercer County identity. The editorial board consists of four editors, two who read poetry, and two who read prose.

A series of questions (attached) was distributed to the Humanities faculty at Mercer County Community College. Seven were returned. Four of those respondents read and discuss what they read in the REVIEW. Those who answered that they did not read the REVIEW say that they "don't have time" to read it or that they "don't read short stuff much." Faculty at Mercer County Community College are allowed to submit their own work, but few of the respondents do. The comments accompanying their response were varied: "I've thought about it..." "No time," and "I get paid for what I write. I don't do freebies" were some of the responses. As with the County College of Morris surveys, question 7 ("In what ways do you think that the Humanities area benefits from having a literary journal associated, in some way, with your college?") caused the most voluble response. Several respondents believe that the REVIEW gives "prestige," "recognition," and "name-value" to the humanities area of the College. Another says that the REVIEW "reflects the best efforts of the humanities area." Another suggests that

specifically for those who teach writing , "it demonstrates that we (and our graduates and associates) can do what we teach, not just talk about it."

The response that we "can do what we teach" reminds me of the response by the CCM faculty member that championing good writing is why we are here. Both responses locate the vitality of teaching in the discipline of writing, which is the precise connection that both the BCC Middle States Self-Evaluation and McGrath and Spear seek among teaching faculties of excellence.

A Literary Magazine at Bergen Community College

Sweet and Bitter Fruit was published annually at Bergen from 1985 to 1990. A total of nine issues were published. It published poetry, prose, and essays by Bergen faculty and was edited by Dr. Mia Anderson. As editor, she found difficulties similar to those described by Dr. Schore, that is, it became an exhausting task to sustain the magazine from the "fruit" of the faculty at Bergen alone. In the last few years of its existence, Dr. Anderson spent some time soliciting material from writers, and even with those efforts, there were many times when she found herself short on material that was of a quality for publication in a college journal. In addition, she found that she was frequently turning to the same writers and, therefore facilitating a vanity publication despite her wishes. The magazine ceased publication in 1991 when Dr. Anderson became heavily involved in the New Jersey Project and could not devote time to the magazine.

I distributed a questionnaire (attached) to the Humanities faculty at Bergen, and received 12 responses. Only five of the respondents were familiar with Sweet and Bitter

Fruit; the others came to Bergen after the cessation of the magazine. These five found that the material available for publication was not "appropriate" or that the limited distribution (the magazine was distributed to Humanites faculty on campus, and copies were available in the Humanities office, but no further distribution was made) did not "justify the efforts of the people [who wrote for it]." It was also considered a "vanity press designed to give 'publication' to anyone and everyone." However, the majority of respondents said that they would welcome the establishment of a literary journal where faculty work such as stories, poems, reviews, and parts of novels would be encouraged but not guaranteed publication.

The next few questions were designed to discover if faculty had participated in a Faculty Development project held in 1995-96, a Writer's Workshop, a faculty group of writers who met periodically to critique each other's work, whether fiction or non-fiction. Only two of the respondents had participated in the Workshop, and others who did not participate, cited restriction of time as the reason they did not.

The next questions asked whether participating in an on-line writer's group with an end toward an on-line "publication" of creative work would be as useful as in-person meetings of a workshop and "hard," meaning 'paper' publication. Almost all respondents felt that a workshop needed to have face-to-face contact to be truly supportive and that "hard" publications had more value, respectability or "weight" than an on-line publication could have.

Yet, it seems that the commitment of time, both for those who would edit such a magazine and those who would participate in an "in-person" workshop, the goal of which might be to produce a literary journal, is impossible to make. So, undaunted by the lack of

enthusiasm for experimenting with an on-line workshop and/or publication, I had conversations with Dr. Michael Redmond, Dean of Arts and Humanities, about such a future possibility.

Dr. Redmond cited President Winn's very determined commitment to move rapidly ahead in technology-supported ventures at Bergen. Bergen has had a Web page with several links since February, 1997, has 8 terminals connected with the internet in the library and has plans to connect all labs to the internet. The eventual goal is to make it possible for virtually all computer-users at Bergen to have network connection. At present, Bergen has an external server, but Dr. Redmond believes that it is only a matter of months before Bergen provides its own private server. Now, most private servers are universities, government agencies, or businesses. However, if Bergen became a private server, it would be possible to develop a 'discussion list', where a faculty member or group could 'own' a list which anyone could subscribe to. For example, the list might be called 'literary works in progress," and a workshop group of Bergen writers might subscribe to it regularly, sharing their own work in progress, as in any workshop. The 'owners' of the list could admit to the discussion comments from any other non-Bergen subscriber, but could also 'moderate' the discussion by, simply put, censuring, any contributions that the 'owners' did not feel contributed appropriately to the discussion. In such a way, Bergen faculty writers could get exposure of their work and support for it even when they did not have time to commit themselves to an in-person workshop that held regular meetings. Further, we might follow the example of Slate, the Kinsley journal now on-line, in which quite famous scholars such as Ronald Dworkin, or well-known journalists such as Andrew Sullivan, carry on debates on a variety of current

issues. Slate has many on-going discussions, and periodically posts its "compost," which is comprised of some "finished" works for a set number of days. "Compost" then woulc become the equivalent of a journal.

Conclusion

It seems evident that faculty at community colleges have a great need to remain connected with their disciplines for many reasons. As McGrath and Spear find, they are not generally socialized according to their discipline interests. It seems also that those who teach in humanities or liberal arts areas, might feel the lack of discipline connection in particularly acute ways. Again, as McGrath and Spear point out, most humanities faculty teach introductory courses and do not enter the mysteries of the discipline with their students in the way that those who teach the students' vocational subject do. Also, community college cultures do not encourage communication by writing, but rather foster an oral, anecdotal environment. Something needs to be done to foster a connection between teaching writing to students and writing, or at least reading publishable writing of peers. What I suggest here will do little for most faculty at community colleges, but I think it will do a great deal for a few, and perhaps it will do enough to warrant the experiment of beginning an on-line workshop and journal, in the forms of a "discussion list" and a "compost."

Footnotes

1/ The 1994-95 Middle States Self-Study of Bergen Community College. All quotes from this text will be introduced as such in the text and followed by the appropriate page number.

2/ Dennis McGrath and Martin B. Spear, The Academic Crisis of the Community College, New York, 1991. Henceforth all quotes from this text will be introduced as such in the text and followed by the appropriate page number(s).

3/ Journal of NJ poets, Vol. XVII, No. 2, ed. Sander Zulauf.

4/ Conversation with Sander Zulauf, April 1, 1997.

5/ The Kelsey Review, Fall 1996, Volume X, ed. Robin Schore

6/ Conversation with Robin Schore, April 2, 1997.

7/ Conversation with Mia Anderson, Feb. 9, 1997

8/ Conversation with Dean Redmond, April 18, 1997

To the Humanities Faculty at Mercer County Community College

I hope that answering these questions will take just a few minute of your time. I plan to use the results of this questionnaire in a paper I am writing for the Princeton mid-Career Fellowship seminar. Could you please return this to Art Schwartz by March 21. Thank you.

Bonnie MacDougall
Humanities Division
Bergen Community College

1. Do you read the Kelsey Review on a regular basis?

2. If you don't, why not?

3. If you don't read it on a regular basis, how often do you read it?

4. Do you and your colleagues ever discuss what you read in the Review

5. If you see writing as one of your professional activities, have you ever submitted work to the Kelsey Review?

6. If you have submitted work to it, do you think that you received the kind of reading and feedback you would expect to receive from a professional journal?

7. In what ways do you think that the Humanities area benefits from having a literary journal associated, in some way, with your colleg

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Dear Colleagues: I hope it will take you just a few minutes to answer these questions. I will use the results of the questions for a paper for the Mid-Career Fellowship Seminar at Princeton, and thank you for your help. Could you return this form to my mailbox in A-335 by April 10. Thanks, Bonnie MacDougall

1. Why was Sweet and Bitter Fruit ultimately not able to sustain itself, and what was your feeling about that journal?

2. Could you indicate your response to the establishment of a literary journal where faculty work such as stories, poems, reviews, and parts of novels would be encouraged but not guaranteed publication.

   a. I would welcome such a journal _____

   b. I would be indifferent to such a journal _____

3. Did you participate in or were you interested in participating in the Faculty Development Writer's Workshop that met in 1995-96?

4. If you were interested in participating in the Writer's Workshop, but did not, why not?

5. Do you think that an on-line writer's group would be as useful as a writer's workshop that met in person, and could you explain your response.

6. Do you think that an on-line "publication" of creative work or work-in-progress would be as useful as a "hard" paper publication of such work,a nd could you explain your response.

To the Humanities Faculty at the County College of Morris

I hope that answering these questions will take just a few minutes of your time. I plan to use the results of this questionnaire in a paper I am writing for the Princeton mid-Career Fellowship seminar. Could you please return this to Sara Pfaffenroth by March 21. Thank you.

Bonnie MacDougall
Humanities Division
Bergen Community College

1. Do you read the Journal of NJ Poets on a regular basis?

2. If you don't, why not?

3. If you don't read it on a regular basis, how often do you read it?

4. Do you and your colleagues ever discuss what you read in the Journal?

5. If you see writing as one of your professional activities, have you ever submitted work to the Journal?

6. If you have submitted work to it, do you think that you received the kind of reading and feedback you would expect to receive from a professional journal?

7. In what ways do you think that the Humanities area benefits from having a literary journal associated, in some way, with your colleg

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